Transit Visa for Indians

1769. SHRI MATILAL SARKAR: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of the progress made in discussion with Bangladesh on issuance of transit visa for journey from Tripura to Kolkata *via* Bangladesh; and

(b) the attitude of Bangladesh Government in issuing transit visa?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Provision for issue of double entry visa already exists in the visa agreement signed between India and Bangladesh in 2001. The government of Bangladesh has been requested at the highest levels to authorise their visa office in Agartala to issue such visas liberally to those travellers intending to travel to Kolkata and back *via* Dhaka.

(c) The Government of Bangladesh is looking into the matter.

Recognition to Iraqi Governing Council by India

1770. SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) Whether it is a fact that India has recognized Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) as the legitimate Governing body of Iraq;

(b) if so, the reasons for Government's objection to sending Indian troops to Iraq as requested by IGC; and

(c) the details of proposals that Government have agreed for the reconstruction of Iraq in post war scenario?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) The unanimously adopted UN Security Council Resolution 1511 determines that the Governing Council and its Ministers are the principal bodies of the Iraqi Interim Administration until an internationally recognized representative government is established. India has taken positive note of various elements of the Resolution.

(b) No specific request for deployment of Indian troops has been received from IGC.

(c) In response to the UN Secretary General's Flash Appeal, early this year, India had committed US$20 million for humanitarian assistance to the Iraqi people. At the Donors Conference held in Madrid on October 23-24, 2003, India has committed an additional amount of US$10 million through Trust Funds being coordinated by the UNDP and IMF respectively for reconstruction needs of iraq. A number of proposals including medical assistance, training of Iraqi personnel including those from Foreign Ministry are being processed.

Discussion on Economic issues Between USA and Indian Private Sector

1771. SHRI R.K. ANAND: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether any breakthrough has been achieved or is expected to be achieved to expand-up-official discussions on economic issues between the USA and Indian private sectors;

(b) whether negotiations were/are being held with USA for a bilateral trade agreement as services and military to military cooperations; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) to (c) The second meeting of the India-U.S. High Technology Cooperation Group (HTCG) was held on November 19-20, 2003. The inudustry component of the meeting was held, in partnership with the private sector, in Bangalore on November 19 and the official dialouge was held in Delhi on November 20. HTCG focuses in particular on non-technology, bio-technology, defence technology and information technology. The two sides have not taken any specific initatives on bilateral trade agreement in services.

Letters of Indian prisoners in Pakistani Jail

1772. SHRI LALIT SURI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to refer to the answer to Starred Question 401 given in the Rajya Sabha on the 21st August, 2003 and state: